

# Labour Market Trends

Environmental Scan Background Paper  
for Developing a College-Wide Master Education Plan

Institutional Research Office  
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# British Columbia

## New BC Economy

“British Columbia is a small, open economy which owes its economic success to internationally competitive export industries....Forestry and mining, the province’s traditional source of economic strength, still earn the largest share of export income. But there is a rapidly growing new economy based on knowledge-intensive secondary manufacturing, tourism, film, fashion clothing and international business services....”

Source: BC Ministry of Employment and Investment, May 98

## BC Employment Openings, 1995 – 2005

Source: COPS, CEISS

### By Education Requirements

44%	Postsecondary, non-university or workforce training
25%	University
17%	Secondary school completion
15%	Some secondary education

## BC Experienced Labour Force by Occupational Group

Source: Census, reported in CEISS draft scan, p. 34

Rank		1996 Employment	Growth since 1991
1	Sales and service	529,000	16%
2	Business, finance and administration	353,000	12%
3	Trades, transport and equipment operators	287,000	1%
4	Management	183,000	6%
5	Social science, education, government and religion	126,000	20%
6	Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing, utilities	102,000	4%
7	Natural and applied sciences	91,000	19%
8	Occupations unique to primary industry	90,000	1%
9	Health occupations	90,000	9%
	Total	1,905,000	11%

## Educational Attainment of the Labour Force

In 1991, about one-third of the population aged 15 years and older had completed some type of post-secondary education or training. By 1996, this share had risen to just over 40 percent. The educational attainment of those aged 35-54 is nearly equal to that of persons in their mid twenties. This means that younger people in general no longer have the educational premium that they enjoyed in the 1970's over their parent's generation.

Historically, the better educated have fared better in the labour market in terms of both employment rates and earnings. However, "Recent evidence is beginning to suggest that the earnings inequalities between the more educated and the less educated may no longer be growing, but actually may begin to decrease. Skills, abilities and competencies, however learned, and in their relationship to relative demands by employers for them, may be a stronger factor in terms of explaining differences in future employment outcomes now that the educational attainment distributions for younger and older worker groups is similar."

Source: CEISS draft environmental scan, pp. 53-54.

## Occupations with the Largest Number of Job Openings in BC, 1998

Note: the number of job openings is affected by both the rate of growth of the occupation and the size of the occupation. Thus an occupation could be declining and yet have many job openings.

Not in rank order.

Accounting Clerks	General Office Clerks	Restaurant, Kitchen & Food Service Managers
Cashiers	Janitors & Bldg Supervisors	Retail & Wholesale Salespersons
Child Care Workers	Light Duty Cleaners	Secretaries
Cooks	Receptionists	Waiters/Waitresses
Food Service Counter Attendants	Registered Nurses	Truck Drivers

Source: BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. Youth Initiative, May 1998.

# Canada

## Labour Market Outlook for Recent Graduates National Projections, 1996 - 2001

Source: Federal Government, Job Futures, 1998

	Program Duration		
	4 Year/Degree	2 Year	1 Year or Less
Fine Arts	Poor	Poor	Fair
Business, Commerce, Mgmt & Admin	Good	Fair	Poor
Education	Fair	Fair	--
Engineering & Engineering Tech	Good	Good	Fair
Humanities & Mass Communication	Fair	Poor	--
Medicine and Health	Fair	Fair	Fair
Life Sciences & Primary Industries	Fair	Fair	Poor
Physical Sciences/Computer Science	Good	Good	Good
Social Sciences and Services	Fair	Fair	Poor
Total	Fair	Fair	Fair

## Skill Levels are Rising

“As the lesser-educated portion of the workforce retires and the well-educated young find jobs..... In just six years, there has been a 10 percentage point increase to 50 percent of the employed workforce now holding a postsecondary credential.

“In terms of skills demanded by employers, the pay structure reflects the increase in demand for higher skilled employees. Contrary to what occurred in the 1980s with the low and the high paid jobs increasing while the mid-range jobs declining in importance, the first half of the 1990s saw the low paid/unskilled jobs decline significantly in importance in favour of the middle and higher paid jobs.”

Source: BC Stats (Ministry of Finance), 1998

## “Youth have been the Real Losers in the 1990s”

Youth unemployment remains high and the gap continues to widen between the unemployment rates for the young and the rest of the workforce. Partly this is due to demographics, following the bulge of the baby boom generation. The decline of the public sector, traditionally an important source of employment for the well-educated young, is another contributor. For the next decade, youth is the group that is most at risk.

Source: BC Stats (Ministry of Finance), 1998

## National Employment Projections, 1996 - 2001

Source: Federal Government, Job Futures, 1998

### *Ratings Used:*

#### *Skill Levels:*

*Managerial*  
*Professional occupations*  
*Technical, paraprofessional and skilled occupations*  
*Intermediate occupations*  
*Labouring and elemental occupations*

#### *Job prospects:*

*Good*  
*Fair*  
*Poor*

### Sales and Service (30% of all jobs)

#### By skill level:

Poor - intermediate and labouring  
Fair - all others

#### By field:

Good - insurance and real estate salespersons, police officers, fire fighters, medical and hospital assistants  
Poor - chefs and cooks, travel and accommodation

#### Summary:

Fair outlook, overall

### Business, Finance and Administration (19% of all jobs)

#### By skill level:

Good - managerial and professional  
Fair - all others

#### By field:

Good - managers, human resource and business service professionals, administrative and regulatory occupations  
Poor - secretaries and office equipment operators

#### Summary:

- the higher the skill level, the more favourable the labour market  
- fair outlook, overall

### Trades, Transport & Equipment Operators (16% of all jobs)

#### By skill level:

Poor - intermediate and labouring  
Fair - all others

#### By field:

Good - machinists and electrical trades and communications  
Fair - transport and equipment operators

#### Summary:

- conditions will remain poor in some occupations, but no occupation is expected to face worse labour market conditions than at present  
- prospects will improve for some occupations

### Processing, Manufacturing and Utilities (8% of all jobs)

By skill level:

Fair - all

By field:

Good - machine operators & assemblers in some industries, such as chemicals & electrical

Poor - machine operators in other industries such as textiles and food & beverage

Summary:

Will remain fair, overall

### Social Sciences, Education, Government Service and Religion (7% of all jobs)

By skill level:

Good - managerial

Fair - all others

By field:

Fair - lawyers (has been good in the past)

Poor - psychologists, social workers, counsellors and ministers of religion  
(has been fair in the past)

Summary:

Fair, overall

### Health (6% of all jobs)

By skill level:

Good - professionals

Fair - all others, including paraprofessionals

By field:

Fair - nurses and therapy occupations

Poor - therapy and assessment professionals

Summary:

Overall is good, but number of new job seekers is growing and may exceed openings in some fields

### Natural & Applied Sciences (5% of all jobs)

By skill level:

Good - managerial and professional

Fair - technical and paraprofessional

By field:

Good - engineering, information systems managers and mathematicians, systems analysts and computer scientists

Poor - life sciences

Summary:

- no occupation will face worse job prospects than currently exist  
- higher skill levels have more favourable prospects

### Primary Industry (5% of all jobs)

By skill level:

Good - managerial

Fair - technical, paraprofessional and skilled

Poor - intermediate and labouring

By field:

Good - supervisors in mining, oil and gas

Poor - fishing and agriculture

Summary:

Remain fair, overall

## Art, Culture, Recreation & Sport (3% of all jobs)

By skill level:

Fair - professionals

Poor - all others

By field:

Fair - writers, editors, public relations professionals, graphic arts technicians, announcers, athletes and coaches

Poor - most other fields

Summary:

- have recently had above average unemployment and below average earnings
- little prospect of improvement
- outlook is poor

## Non Standard Conditions of Work

Three main employment categories have emerged:

- Core: Full-year, chiefly full-time
- Contract: Skilled, self-employed and professional workers who work mainly on a contract or project basis, either chiefly for one organization or a number of different ones
- Contingent: Peripheral group of workers involved in part-time, temporary or seasonal work

Only one in three Canadian workers holds a “core” job, i.e. full-time, permanent, Monday to Friday, regular day-time hours, outside the home for a single employer.

Workers just starting out or re-entering the labour force after an extended absence, regardless of education, training and skill level, are finding it increasingly difficult to enter a core employment position immediately.

## Self-Employment and Small Business

Self-employment has been the fastest growing part of work in BC during the 1990's.

One in four employees in BC works in an organization with less than 20 employees.  
40 percent of all employees work in organizations with less than 50 employees.

“These trends also have implications for today's graduates in terms of the self-marketing and business skills they may require to operate as contractors, or to compete for job opportunities in a small business or a community non-profit entity. Such an expansion of skills may be crucial to such individuals now in addition to primarily just applied and academic content skills and competencies that are needed by employees in large organizations.....Small firms by definition and necessity embody many of the elements of a team-based, flatter environment in which work is organized.....The team-based approach is built on worker participation in the information flow and decision-making, broadly designed job descriptions, and multi-skilled workers often receiving compensation based on performance and skill.”

Source: CEISS draft environmental scan, pp. 41-43.

## International

## Skills and Abilities

“...employer survey evidence suggests “credentialism” per se is weakening, with skills, abilities and competencies both in an applied and generic sense being most important. We would argue the skills learned through secondary and/or post-secondary participation are an important, but not the only, component...of a person’s “skills, competencies and abilities” as viewed from the employers’ [perspective]....

“Many more workers than in the past are being required to adjust quickly to changes in their jobs and how they perform. Adaptability applies especially to those entering the labour market in their late teens or early 20’s, who do not have the benefit of considerable work experience. “Employability skills” such as problem solving and communication skills (or whatever one might call them) as well as content or applied skills can be developed through both post-secondary education or training and informal methods or life experiences. When combined with a willingness and acceptance to continually learn throughout life, these elements appear to be a useful foundation for individuals to successfully adapt to a rapidly changing labour market environment. At the same time, different content and applied skills do matter greatly to employers.

“...in addition to job-specific technical skills, workers also possess a broad platform of so-called soft skills, or generic or employability skills: problem solving, teamwork, communications, and adaptability. Some feel that many of these intangible employability skills are developed through post-secondary education, especially university education. Such proponents point out that employment rates for university graduates continue to be higher....”

Source: draft CEISS environmental scan, pp. 37-44

## Characteristics of the Sub-Baccalaureate Labour Market

(Excerpts from a book by Norton Grubb. See Appendix for details)

The sub-baccalaureate labour market consists of those individuals who have at least high school graduation but not a baccalaureate degree, individuals who may or may not have some college education:

*These mid-skilled occupations fall intermediate between the unskilled labor market, where education makes little difference, and the baccalaureate-level labor market, where formal schooling makes all the difference. This is a segment of the labor market where formal schooling and training can make a substantial difference to employment options and earnings, although it often does not.*

In the United States, this market includes about three-fifths of all workers and is growing. Although large, it is a poorly studied and understood sector.

Grubb argues that the sub-baccalaureate labour-market is relevant to many university transfer students, as well as occupational students, because so many students entering college do not know what they want to do. Experimenters taking a roster of courses, they are frequently casting about for a career. Furthermore, many transfer students do not actually transfer or, if they do transfer, do not necessarily complete a degree. Such students are, by definition, members of the sub-baccalaureate labour market.

The sub-baccalaureate labour market has a number of distinctive characteristics that help explain why the economic returns from sub-baccalaureate education are so uneven, with some kinds of postsecondary education providing no economic advantage at all. Dominated by small employers with informal employment practices and cyclical variations in hiring, it is local in nature and often values experience over formal schooling. These characteristics also explain why it is so difficult for individuals to learn about this sector of the labour market and to make their way through it on a career path.

*First and foremost, it is clear that the critics of community colleges and other two-year institutions who claim that they provide no economic benefits are incorrect. Some fields of study, especially business and health occupations for women and business and technical subjects for men, have especially high returns; and individuals in jobs related to their fields of study while in college enjoy especially high benefits. However, it is equally clear that some kinds of postsecondary education provide no economic advantage at all. Low-earning fields and many academic fields, have low or uncertain returns, and those who have failed to find related employment often do not benefit from their postsecondary education. It is unclear that prospective students, facing an array of postsecondary education options, have sufficient knowledge to make rational decisions.*

*I conclude that the best course for a student is to complete an occupational credential and find related employment. An academic degree is second-best, both at the baccalaureate level and the associate level, where the returns to academic associate degrees are substantial but less than those to related occupational credentials. The least beneficial course is to complete an occupational degree but then fail to find related employment. In part, this finding helps explain the variation in returns to different fields of study, since some fields - business and health occupations, for example - have higher rates of related employment than do others.*

In coming to these conclusions, three of the topics Grubb discussed are especially interesting. One concerns the importance of experience in the sub-baccalaureate market: with the exception of licensed occupations, such as in health, the skills employers are seeking in this market are more easily demonstrated by job applicants through experience than through formal schooling:

*But formal schooling is only one of several factors that influence hiring, and individuals without experience, or without the personal characteristics that employers are searching for, find it difficult to compensate with formal schooling alone. Thus to find individuals employment in the field of their education, placement efforts are crucial to the economic benefits of community colleges.*

Experience is the basic requirement and community college education an additional benefit, rather than the reverse.

A second topic of interest was the importance of finding employment related to the student's field of studies. Unlike the baccalaureate-level labour market, the economic value of college education depends to a large extent on whether an individual finds employment related to his or her education. Overall, individuals with credentials have higher rates of related employment than do those with small amounts of college, and so part of the economic benefits of completing coherent programs is due to the advantage provided by finding employment related to one's field of study.

The third interesting topic was the contradictions in what employers want: "on the one hand, employers value highly job-specific skills, but also complain about the lack of general and 'academic' capacities."

*The skills necessary for entry-level employment are much more specific than those required for promotion and positions of increasing responsibility. Skills necessary in the short run may obscure the skills necessary for promotion and mobility in the long run. Students from occupational programs are left in the worst of both worlds: lacking the specific skills necessary for entry-level jobs and also without the more general competencies necessary for promotion over the longer run.*

Grubb's solution to this dilemma, laddering and articulating programs, arises from his analysis of the lack of value of very short job training programs:

*Typically, job training programs do not prepare individuals for the sub-baccalaureate labour market: their economic benefits are relatively small and short-lived. One way to improve these programs - perhaps the only way - is to re-integrate job training with the kinds of education programs now provided in two-year colleges.*

## **“Hot” Career Programs in US Community Colleges**

The American Association of Community Colleges conducted a survey of its members in 1997 to identify “hot” programs, those in which program completers are hired immediately following, or in some cases before, graduation. They found nursing, computer-related technologies, and electronics technologies are the top programs. The number of computer-related programs mentioned by community colleges as hot nearly doubled from six in 1994 to 11 in 1997. The top 25 programs in the 244 colleges that responded were as follows :

	<b>Number of Programs</b>
1 Registered Nursing	84
2 Computer Tech/computer Info Systems	54
3 Electronics Technology/Elec.Engineering	29
4 Physical Therapy (Assistant)	24
5 Automotive	21
6 Law Enforcement/Criminal Justice/Human Services	21
7 Computer Programming	20
8 Dental Hygiene	16
9 Machinist/Machine Tool Technology	12
10 Occupational Therapist (Assistant)	12
11 Business	11
12 Drafting and Design	11
13 Manufacturing Process Technology	11
14 Computer Assisted Design	10
15 Licensed Practical Nursing	10
16 Refrigeration/AC/Heating	10
17 Early Childhood Development	9
18 Respiratory Therapy	9
19 Telecommunications/Interactive; Info Specialists	8
20 Computer and Software Applications	7
21 Computer Science	7
22 Environmental Studies	7
23 Graphic Arts	7
24 Health Information Technology	7
25 Culinary Arts	6

# APPENDIX:

## Excerpts from “Working in the Middle”

*Excerpts from the first three chapters of:*

*Grubb, W. Norton. (1996) Working in the Middle: Strengthening Education and Training for the Mid-Skilled Labor Force. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.*

- 2 The sub-baccalaureate labor market as I define it - *those individuals who have at least a high school diploma but not a baccalaureate degree, individuals who may or may not have some college education* - includes about three-fifths of all workers.
- 7 Despite the size and growth of the sub-baccalaureate labor market, there has been a surprising lack of attention to it. While the benefits of college-going - almost always defined as attaining a baccalaureate degree - are well known, information about the effects of sub-baccalaureate education has been sparse.

### The Mid-Skilled Labor Market

- xv These mid-skilled occupations fall intermediate between the unskilled labor market, where education makes little difference, and the baccalaureate-level labor market, where formal schooling makes all the difference. This is a segment of the labor market where formal schooling and training *can* make a substantial difference to employment options and earnings, although it often does not.
- 11 The sub-baccalaureate labor market is almost entirely local.
- 13 Employment policies are rarely written down, and hiring procedures are quite casual.
- 14 Hiring in the sub-baccalaureate labor market is strongly cyclical, and employment is intermittent. Incentives for individuals to invest substantially in skills over long periods of time are weaker.
- 15 Dominated by smaller firms. The path upward requires one to move to larger firms.
- 16 The employers who dominate hiring in the sub-baccalaureate labor market are relatively uninformed about the supply of educated labor. There is a widespread sense among employers that the job-related education and training system is chaotic and fragmented.
- 17 In practice, small size thwarts the development of the information that is necessary for markets to operate efficiently. Each participant is relatively uninformed about the others because the small size of the institutions makes it difficult to accumulate information.

### Long-Term Changes in Organization and Occupations

- 17 The dominant change in the organization of work has been the trend toward flatter hierarchies with fewer supervisory layers; as a consequence, individuals must perform a wider variety of tasks.
- 18 As a result, older occupational divisions are no longer clear.

- 19 For jobs whose boundaries are expanding, postsecondary vocational programs are often too narrowly defined, since they provide only a subset of the skills required

### The Skills Employers Want

- 21 Most of the competencies required by employers in the sub-baccalaureate labor market cannot readily be taught in schools and colleges.
- 22 When employers mentioned sending employees back to school, they did so to have them learn the particular computer systems or production technologies required on that specific job, not for general education.
- 23 Employers that we interviewed complained constantly about the lack of basic skills among their sub-baccalaureate employees.
- 28 One particular contradiction arises time and again. On the one hand, employers value highly job-specific skills, but also complain about the lack of general and “academic” capacities.
- 29 The skills necessary for entry-level employment are much more specific than those required for promotion and positions of increasing responsibility. Skills necessary in the *short* run may obscure the skills necessary for promotion and mobility in the *long* run. Students from occupational programs are left in the worst of both worlds: lacking the specific skills necessary for entry-level jobs and also without the more general competencies necessary for promotion over the longer run. One striking conclusion: how unimportant the kinds of capacities usually learned in formal schooling are.
- 30 The role of formal schooling in hiring standards are relatively weak.

### Hiring Standard: The Roles of Experience and Education

- 30 The need for competencies that are not well taught in educational institutions means that virtually all employers in the sub-baccalaureate labor market look for experience when hiring, particularly experience in virtually the same kind of procedure or production facility. Much more than formal schooling, experience is an indicator of the presence of skills that employers value.
- 34 One important exception to the general pattern of requiring experience over formal schooling appeared in technical fields.

### Preferences for Community College Education

- 36 It is clear that experience is the basic requirement and community college education an additional benefit, rather than the other way around.
- 37 Because employers give some preference to applicants with community college credentials, such individuals can often make their way into mid-skilled positions by working their way up from relatively unskilled positions. Their postsecondary education may make them more productive on the job, which will earn them promotion over time. But their postsecondary education will not itself move them higher up the salary scale.

## Licensing and “Organized” Occupations

- 39 The existence of licensing provisions specifying the educational requirements for particular health occupations creates a clear relationship between schooling and employment. The contrast is striking between these *organized* occupations, in which required skills have been carefully codified by committees and markets for other occupations where required skills vary substantially and are not codified at all.

## Promotion Practices and Advancement

- 42 Positions above entry level jobs are filled through internal promotion. Almost universally, internal promotion is based on job performance.
- 43 The dominance of internal promotion and of promotion based on job performance means that the capacities employers cite as necessary on the job - motivation, cooperation, initiative, adaptability, communications skills, the ability to learn new tasks, and other foundation skills - are crucial for long-term success. Employers consistently cite these capacities as more important than job-specific skills.
- 44 Mobility among companies is difficult because of the tendency for all companies to hire from their existing pool of employees. Consequently, opportunities for upward mobility and growth in earnings depend crucially on how an individual gains entry into the sub-baccalaureate labor market.

## Conclusions: Navigating in the Sub-Baccalaureate Labor Market

- 45 Difficult to see what kinds of careers are available. The conventional notion of a “career” - which we may define by a clear progression of jobs, from a modestly skilled entry-level position to those of greater skill, responsibility, and earnings - has been replaced (if it ever existed) with careers that individuals have to shape for themselves, that they must construct by moving among positions and among employers. All in all, the characteristics of the sub-baccalaureate labor market make it more difficult to know how to prepare for entry into many of these occupations, how to find initial employment, or what avenues of upward mobility are likely to materialize. These characteristics also help explain why the economic returns from sub-baccalaureate education are so uneven.
- 46 But formal schooling is only one of several factors that influence hiring, and individuals without experience, or without the personal characteristics that employers are searching for, find it difficult to compensate with formal schooling alone. Thus to find individuals employment in the field of their education, placement efforts are crucial to the economic benefits of community colleges.

## Educational Pathways into the Mid-Skilled Labor Market

Students in Community Colleges: The Challenges of “Getting into the World”

- 68 The most striking aspect of students in community colleges is that they come for an amazing variety of reasons. But the majority of students, at least three-quarters were in the community college for essentially vocational purposes. These students recognize that some kind of postsecondary education is necessary, even if they aren't sure why. Overwhelmingly, they cited low cost and convenience, meaning proximity to home, as reasons for choosing a two-year college. In addition, these younger students often acknowledge their lack of direction as the reason for choosing a low-cost institution.
- 69 The vast majority of older students were interviewed were individuals who had spent enough time in a series of low-paid, low-status, or dead-end jobs and were looking for *another* career, rather than upgrading their position in their current occupation.
- 71 The decision to go to a community college is typically based on casual recommendations.
- 72 But the majority of students by far were using their initial enrollment to find out what they might do, taking courses as a way of trying out different careers, seeing what the academic requirements are like, and assessing their own strengths and weaknesses.
- 74 A large number of the individuals hoping to find a career are enrolled in the "general education" or transfer program, probably because in the absence of any clear direction on their part, the transfer program is at least a well-established route to a future (the baccalaureate degree) whose value is substantial. Although these students say they are in the transfer program, they are still very much experimenters.
- 78 The deeper problem is that the process of counseling and guidance is inherently limited. More active forms of considering career alternatives, particularly the work -based programs may be more effective.
- 79 A second conclusion is that many students entering community college do not know what they want to do. They use the college to figure that out, by taking a roster of courses in the hopes of finding something they like to do. The assertion that most of them are well-informed - that they are there for job upgrading, or to pursue specific careers - or the equivalent assumption on the part of policy makers that voucher like mechanisms are appropriate because students are well informed is simply wrong.

### The Implications for Institutions and Policy

- 82 Our interviews also reveal that community colleges are vocational institutions - not necessarily in the specific sense that all students think of themselves as occupational students (although about 60 percent of them do), but in the deeper sense that most students are there to find their way into the labor market. The statements that surveys collect from individuals about their educational goals cannot be trusted; for students unsure of their futures and unaware of their options, these statements are uninformed guesses rather than concrete plans. Course taking provides information about *schooling*, not about *occupational futures*. One implication for community colleges, then, is that they need to take their broadly defined occupational purposes more seriously than some of them do.
- 84 The motives of students are crucial to all these findings, and anything educational institutions can do to help students attain direction for themselves will help the preparation of the sub-baccalaureate labor force.

## The Effects of Finding Related Employment

- 96 In the case of vocational and professional programs, the economic benefits of postsecondary education may depend on whether an individual finds employment related to his or her education.
- 97 For individuals with baccalaureate degrees, roughly 60 percent of individuals in occupational areas have related employment. The extent of relatedness among individuals with certificates hovers around 55 percent. Overall, individuals with credentials have higher rates of related employment than do those with small amounts of college, and so part of the higher economic benefits of completing coherent programs is due to the advantage provided by finding employment related to one's field of study.
- 98 These results imply that completing coursework is necessary but not sufficient: placement in a related occupation is absolutely crucial to realizing the potential benefits of occupational education.
- 100 I conclude that the best course for a student is to complete an occupational credential and find related employment. An academic degree is second-best, both at the baccalaureate level and the associate level, where the returns to academic associate degree are substantial but less than those to related occupational credentials. The least beneficial course is to complete an occupational degree but then fail to find related employment. In part, this finding helps explain the variation in returns to different fields of study, since some fields - business and health occupations, for example - have higher rates of related employment than do others.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

- 105 First and foremost, it is clear that the critics of community colleges and other two-year institutions who claim that they provide no economic benefits are incorrect. Some fields of study, especially business and health occupations for women and business and technical subjects for men, have especially high returns; and individuals in jobs related to their fields of study while in college enjoy especially high benefits. However, it is equally clear that some kinds of postsecondary education provide no economic advantage at all. Low-earning fields and many academic fields, have low or uncertain returns, and those who have failed to find related employment often do not benefit from their postsecondary education. It is unclear that prospective students, facing an array of postsecondary education options, have sufficient knowledge to make rational decisions.